

History of

ROGUE RIVER NATIONAL ROOSTER CROWING CONTEST

(FOUNDED IN 1953)



"When I grow up, I'm going to enter the Rogue River National Rooster Crowing Contest--maybe next year."



"Last Saturday in June"



In April of 1953, the merchants of Rogue River formed an organization which was called the Rogue River Boosters Club. The aim of this group was to boast the City of Rogue River and the community and to let it be known that it was a town--not a river. One of the members said that he had once read about some miners holding a rooster crowing contest, and the group thought that this would be a novel event and might be just the thing to boost their town.

For that first Rooster Crow, it was decided that the group would pledge \$100 to be given in prizes, with the first prize of \$50 going to the owner of the rooster crowing the most number of times in a 30-minute period. Tentative plans for this first year of the crow were that this event would be held quarterly or semi-annually.

According to the April 30, 1953 issue of The Times (Rogue River's weekly newspaper), "Immediately following the announcement that the contest would be staged, newspapers in all parts of the country and radio stations in their broadcasts told of the impending contest. This was what the Boosters had hoped for--something to publicize Rogue River as a town."

Prior to the first Rogue River National Rooster Crowing Contest, which was held on May 23, 1953, the merchants displayed the caged roosters in front of their places of business. During this time, roosters were stolen or hidden away and many shenanigans took place.

First place winner of this initial event was a rooster named "Hollerin' Harry". He crowed 71 times during the half-hour period and won \$50 for his owner. After the contest was over, an auction was held for anyone wanting to sell their roosters. "Silent Sam", who had not uttered a sound during the contest, started in with a bid of 10¢ and ended up at \$50.

A second contest was held during 1953, this one taking place on September 5. For this one, the merchants decided to give \$200 in prizes, with the first prize \$100 and the balance going to the runners-up. Winner of this contest was "Beetlebaum" with 109 crows. "Beetlebaum's" record has never been surpassed up to this time.

After this second crow in 1953, the Boosters organization decided to hold the Rooster Crow once a year and that the date would be the last Saturday in June.

Prior to the 1954 event, the organization decided to give \$250 in cash prizes, with \$100 for first place and seven additional prizes; also \$10 for the best cage. That contest was attended by about 2,000 spectators. Winner of first place was "Rocky" with 79 crows. "Beetlebaum's" son, "Beetlebaum II", in trial work-outs in his own backyard had crowed as many as 102 times in 30 minutes. In the actual contest, he did not make a sound. The winning cage was made to look like an old southern mansion.

In 1955, "Prince Albert" brought \$100 to his owner and a trophy for winning first place with 81 crows. He was one of 142 entries that year. Another winner this year was a rooster that had been purchased at the "rooster auction" last year for 50¢ and this year brought its owner a prize of \$50. That was a 50¢ investment which really paid off.

The year is 1956 and the prize money has now been raised to \$500 with \$250 and a trophy going to first place winner. This year's honors were won by "Briggs" with 70 crows.

In 1957, a beautiful rooster named "Goldie" and its owner were the recipients of \$250 and a trophy. To do this, "Goldie" crowed 66 times in the 30-minute contest.

The winner in 1958 was "Rusty" with 68 crows and, as before, \$250 and a trophy went to the owner. From The Times issue of June 27, 1958, "A little red banty rooster that never had done anything notable in his life except chase grasshoppers and hens, won over 263 other roosters to become Rooster Crowing Champion of the world". The winning cage this year was built in the form of a fireplace.

As in previous years, the Rogue River National Rooster Crowing Contest was given wide publicity on TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. In addition to this, 10,000 brochures were mailed to people throughout the country. This was the year (1959) of the Oregon Centennial and we wanted to tell as many people as possible about the "town" of Rogue River and our unusual contest.

For the first time since the start of the Rooster Crow, there was a tie with "Sandy" and "Twinkle Twerp" both crowing 67 times. Owners of the roosters shared in the first and second prizes. On August 29, a "crow off" was held between the two roosters to find out which one was the National Rooster Crowing Champion. This was won by "Sandy" crowing 96 times and winning the trophy. This was the second highest number of crows since "Beetlebaum's record of 109 crows in the second contest in 1953. "Twinkle Twerp" crowed 82 times.

In 1960, the site of the annual Rooster Crow event was moved to the grade school grounds and has been held there ever since. Winning the contest in 1960 was "Jerome" with 67 crows. Last year's winner "Sandy" only crowed 20 times and "Twinkle Twerp" came in 3rd this year with 56 crows.

In 1961, the Rogue River National Rooster Crowing Contest was taken over by the local Chamber of Commerce. To help raise funds for the prizes, a smorgasbord was held and a dance. Winner of the 1961 event was "Rascal" who gave out 69 lusty crows to walk away with the honors. Also participating in this year's event was "Hoosier Hot Shot" which was an entry from Purdue University. There was a surprise (and unusual) entry this year--a peacock.

Starting in 1962, it was decided to hold an auction to help raise funds for the prizes and this turned out to be very successful. Winning the distinction of being the "crowingest" rooster in the world in 1962 was "Geronimo" with 63 crows. In addition to prizes for the most number of crows and the best cages, a prize was given for the rooster from the farthest distance. The winner this year was from Oakland, Calif.

In making plans for the 1963 event, the Rogue River Chamber of Commerce decided that there should be a queen to rule over the events of the day. Subsequently, a queen contest was held which

was open to girls who were students in the Rogue River High School and the winner was the first Rooster Crow Queen. The national rooster crowing champion for this year was "Mac-A-Doo". About 2,000 people listened to "Mac-A-Doo" crow 90 times to take first place and to bring money and a trophy to his owner. Last year's winner was also "in the money", having come in 5th with 65 crows. Prize for the best cage this year was for one built in the form of a Chinese pagoda, and the rooster from the farthest distance came from Ventura, Calif.

In 1964, "Mac's Joe", a Golden Sealwright rooster, crowed 69 times to win first place money and a trophy. A rooster came all the way from Murray, Utah to enter this year's crow.

"Black Fella" was the winner in 1965. It took him 71 crows to bring honor to his owner. Florida was represented at this year's crow and, of course, the rooster from that state won the prize for coming the farthest distance. The cage winning this year's prize was in the shape of a missile.

In 1966, it took 80 crows to walk away with the first prize and the trophy. This was done by "Drum Stick". The rooster that traveled the farthest distance this year came from Braintree, Mass.

How do you make a rooster crow? There doesn't seem to be any sure way. Some folks keep the cages covered until just before the crowing contest. They feel that in this way the rooster will think it is morning when the cage is uncovered and will then start to crow -- hoping, of course, that it will be enough times to get that first prize, or at least one of the prizes.

It might be noted here that no rooster has won first place more than one time.

In these contests, it is interesting to note the names of the competing roosters and it appears that some thought has gone into the naming of these contestants. Some of the names are: Gorgeous George, Black Tornado, Silent Sam, Ouiji from Fiji, Powder Puff, Short Snort, No Crow, Egg Head, King Tut, Piccolo Pete, Dinah Mite, RePete, Pot Pie, Chick Sales, Rogue Canary, and many, many others too numerous to mention.

Another interesting thing that has been noticed is that the winners are usually bantam roosters and gamecocks, or a cross breed of the two.

Up until the shortage of silver dollars in this country, the prizes were made up of silver dollars. These were placed in cloth bags and you can be sure that those persons carrying away 250 silver dollars in a bag had quite a weight on their hands. But, alas, the silver dollars are not given to Rooster Crow winners any more -- now they go to coin collectors.

As in all events throughout the country, changes are made from year to year. Since its start in 1953, this unusual event is drawing more and more people each year and is getting bigger and better each year. One of the things that has been added is an art show. This has become an outstanding addition and is drawing more artists every year. Each year it has become necessary to find more room for the art show which presents the wonderful talents of the people here in Southern Oregon.

Part of the activities each year include a Huck Finn contest for boys and a Let's Pretend contest for girls. In the past, contests have included such antics as climbing a greased pole or catching a greased pig; and there was also a fly casting contest.

Another innovation of the Rooster Crowing Contest was to have "guests of the day". This was done by selecting a vacationing family from Valley of the Rogue State Park which is located about three miles from the City of Rogue River. They start the day off by riding in the parade and then enjoy the rest of the day with the Rooster Crow and the activities surrounding it.

This most unusual event is started off each year with a parade in the morning. The parade has now become quite a spectacle with nearly 50 entries participating for the parade prizes in the various categories. In addition to entries by local groups and organizations, there are many from Grants Pass and Medford, as well as other nearby communities. One very interesting one is the Old Timers Car Club. They will have from 10 to 20 restored antique cars in the parade. An entry that is always exciting is the Grants Pass Cavemen and their "cave" on wheels. You can hear lots of screaming when one of the Cavemen catches one of the girls and puts her in the "cave".

Other entries in the parades have included the Moon Mountain Dancers, a group of Indians representing the Sioux, Blackfoot and Mohawk tribes; also a miniature entry was a Pekinese dog pulling a tiny covered wagon which brought smiles to the faces of the spectators. Others entered in the parades include mounted groups, baton twirlers, bands, floats, etc.

After the conclusion of the parade, there is plenty of fun and good food to be had on the school grounds before and after the Rooster Crowing Contest. Local groups and organizations have booths serving something to tickle the palate; others have games of skill and fun; and, of course, there are those that provide souvenirs with which to remember the day.

Like the Calavaras Frog Jumping Contest, the Rogue River National Rooster Crowing Contest is gaining publicity. An article appeared in the New York Times telling of this unusual event, and United Air Lines has listed it in their leaflets telling their passengers of different activities taking place around the country.

Will we see YOU at the Rogue River National Rooster Crowing Contest in Rogue River, Oregon this year or next year? Hope so.

